



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: Feb. 27, 2004 (04-15)
Contact: Dr. Kathy Connell (360) 902-1878
Kate Sandboe (360) 902-1815

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560

Horse owners reminded to prepare for West Nile virus

OLYMPIA — Spring is in the air, which means mosquitoes soon will be too. State Veterinarian Dr. Kathy Connell reminds all horse owners to take precautions against mosquitoes and a disease they carry, West Nile virus.

A bite by an infected mosquito can result in infection of horses, humans and many species of birds. Last year, Washington and Oregon were the only states in the country that did not report any positive cases of West Nile virus (WNV) in any species.

“Now is the time to vaccinate your horse against the disease,” said Dr. Connell, “If horses are being vaccinated for the first time, they need a series of two shots, three to six weeks apart. If the horse was previously vaccinated with the series, it needs an annual booster before the beginning of the mosquito season. Horse owners should contact their private veterinarians for vaccination and other health information.”

The best way to minimize the threat of WNV is to control mosquitoes and prevent horses from being exposed to adult mosquitoes. Some protective measures include changing the water in livestock troughs, fountains, birdbaths and wading pools weekly during mosquito season. Owners may also consider draining or treating stagnant water, mowing grass and weeds, putting up screens to protect homes and stables from mosquitoes, and putting horses in stables at night. Repellents and insecticides should be used only according to label directions, and it is important not to drain or fill wetlands, as they provide benefits that far outweigh the small chance of contracting WNV.

Veterinarians and horse owners should alert the State Veterinarian’s office if they observe unusual signs of illness in any equine, to include horse, mules, ponies and donkeys. Signs of West Nile virus in these animals can include loss of appetite, listlessness, stumbling, lack of coordination, weakness of limbs, partial paralysis and death. While many exposed equines show no signs of illness, WNV can be fatal in about 30 percent of the cases.

More WNV information is available on the following Web sites:

Department of Agriculture, <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/default.htm>

Department of Health, <http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHP/TS/ZOO/WNV/WNV.HTML>

U.S. Department of Agriculture, <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/wnv/wnv.html>

Washington State University, <http://www.wnv.wsu.edu>.

###